# ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

*An Appreciation*

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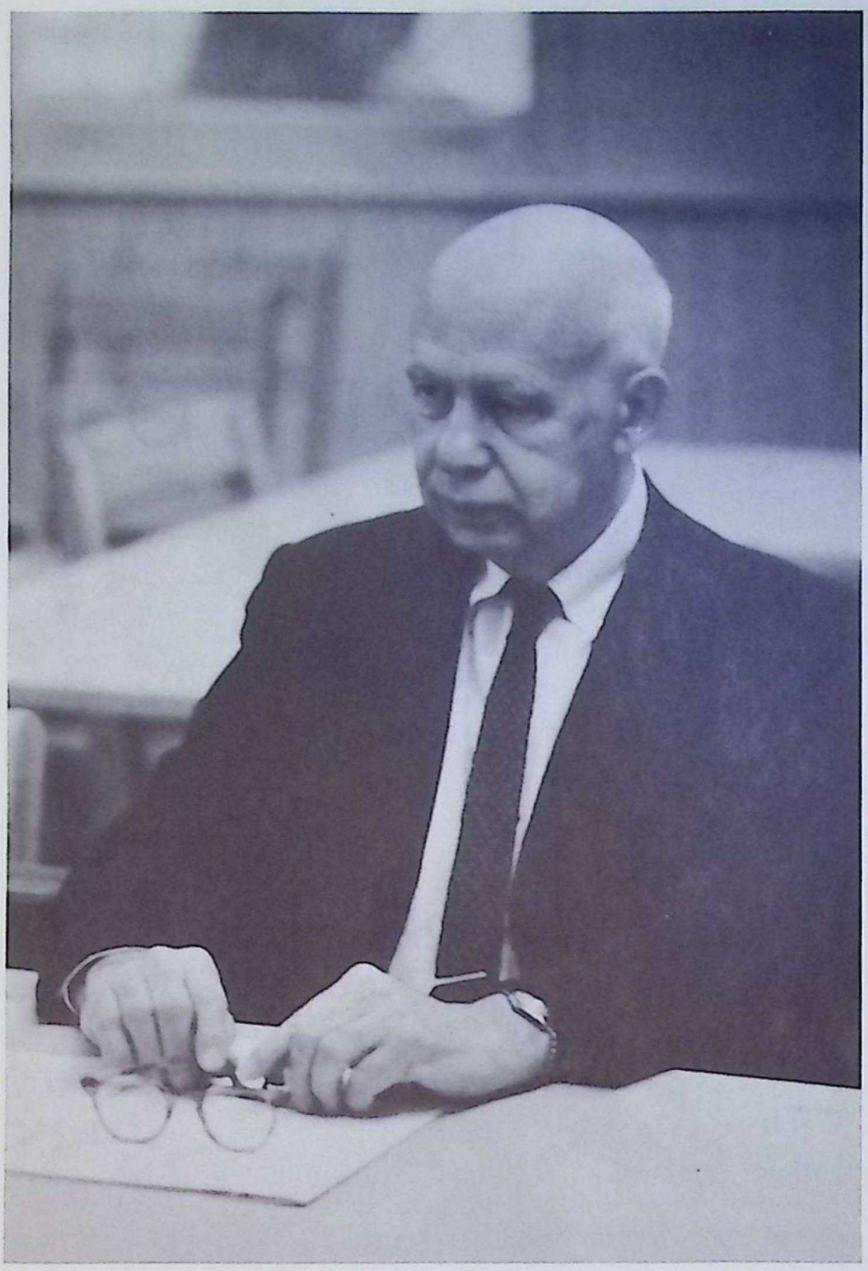
1964
UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
IN VIRGINIA
RICHMOND, VIRGINIA



ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

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*Some families have a practice of circulating among their members a general letter which deals with matters of familial concern. In a sense this brochure is a family communication, published by Union Theological Seminary in Virginia for distribution to its students, alumni, and friends. It most certainly deals with a matter of genuine importance to that community.*

*Ernest Trice Thompson, for forty-two years a member of the Seminary's faculty, will retire from this ministry on June 30, 1964. His association with the Seminary began in September 1915 when he entered as a Junior. His student days were interrupted in 1917 for two years' service in the military forces during World War I. He graduated with the Bachelor of Divinity degree as a member of the class of 1920. Awarded the Moses D. Hoge Fellowship, he received his Master of Theology degree in 1921. After a year's pastorate in El Paso, Texas, he returned to the Seminary in 1922 as teacher of English Bible, a responsibility he held until 1925. Since 1925 he has been The John Q. Dickinson Professor of Church History in the Faculty of the Seminary.*

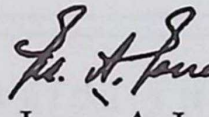
*In this volume three men as representatives of a very large company have written of Dr. Thompson as teacher, author, and churchman.*

*There is another word to be said, however, and probably first of all. Those of us who have been associated for some years with "Dr. E. T." in the routines of duty will testify to his gentleness, his simplicity, and his piety. Always probing great issues with indefatigableness of the true workman and the true perseverance of the genuine scholar, he has never been too busy for nor insensitive to the needs of one person wanting a friend at any instant. In a sense he has worked and believed as if the whole world were his parish. But whether in the hall, in the office, in the study, on the campus, in his home, he has had a ready ear and a warm heart for any who sought his counsel or needed to hear a helpful word about the Lord of Life.*

*So, as we are profoundly grateful for what Dr. Thompson has done and been in his leadership within the Seminary, the Presbyterian Church, and the broader reaches of the worldwide community of faith, we are mindful that among us in every relation he has been a kindly friend, reflecting the genuineness of his love for God by the constancy of his love for his fellowmen.*

*It is hard to anticipate the affairs of Union Theological Seminary without Ernest Trice Thompson as a partner in the enterprise. His influence will continue among us so long as any of us who have shared it can transmit something of his diligence in duty under Christ. We rejoice that his service to the church will continue these next years as he assumes positions of responsibility in other educational institutions and carries on his ministry of writing and research.*

*We express our gratitude for what Dr. Ernest Trice Thompson has done and for what he is.*



James A. Jones, *President*
*Union Theological Seminary in Virginia*

ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

*Teacher*

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ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

*Journalist*

*and*

*Author*

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ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

*Churchman*

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BIBLIOGRAPHY

# ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

. . . . . *Teacher*

IF THE TEACHER of history can be judged by his influence upon the course of history, Ernest Trice Thompson must be given an A plus. No living man has had more influence upon the Presbyterian Church in the United States in his day—or, we might say, in this century—than this gentle professor whose primary academic discipline has pointed his scholarly interests in the direction of the past. In a remarkable career as writer and ecclesiastical statesman he has made the insights of yesterday serve the living church, as other contributions to this brochure show. But perhaps more than in any other way he has molded Southern Presbyterian history through his students.

The records show that in forty-two years on the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in Virginia Ernest Thompson has taught 2,474 undergraduates and has supervised the work of some sixty graduate students. This number does not include other hundreds of men and women he has taught at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education nor the countless others who have sat at his feet in conferences, leadership schools, and other teaching situations. It is a rare student who has gone forth from his classroom without having his outlook broadened, his convictions clarified and strengthened. Few of them have become church historians, but many have become leaders who are now shaping the history of the church.

## *The Areas of Teaching*

Ernest Thompson is usually thought of as a professor of church history because this has been his major discipline, but his fields of instruction have extended far beyond the historical. At Union Seminary, where he has spent all of his professorial life, he began, in 1922, as acting professor of the English Bible. He was named associate Stuart Robinson professor

of the English Bible and associate professor of pastoral theology in 1923 and, in 1924, he became full professor of the English Bible. In the following year he was elected by the Seminary's Board of Trustees as the John Q. Dickinson professor of church history and polity, which chair he has held ever since. During all this time he has also taught classes at the Presbyterian School of Christian Education. The various chairs which he has held in the Seminary bespeak the wide range of his competencies, but they do not fully indicate the variety of fields in which he has taught over the course of the years. Throughout his career he has been a welcome and effective teacher of the Bible; even when he had no other biblical assignments in the curriculum, his first course in church history always began with an exposition of a large portion of the Book of Acts. He once remarked that Bible teaching was his first love. To read his weekly expositions of Scripture for the church school in the *Presbyterian Outlook* is to sense his enthusiasm for bringing the Bible to life, especially when one remembers that this has been a labor of love laid on top of other commitments which in themselves would constitute a task greater than most men could perform. He never held a chair in the field of doctrine, but his elective course on the history of Christian thought, introduced in the academic year 1926-1927, inaugurated the teaching of the history of doctrine in the Seminary and was continued until the coming of Dr. John Haddon Leith in 1958 as professor of historical theology. The course in the history of Christian thought immediately became popular and proved to be one of the major influences in the doctrinal development of many generations of Seminary students. When we recall that he was for a year the associate professor of pastoral theology and that for most of his career he has taught church polity, it becomes apparent that Dr. Thompson has offered courses representing all four of the major disciplines of theological education. Moreover, he has taught them all with high competency and enthusiastic acceptance.

## *The Making of the Teacher*

What were the determining factors that formed the mind of Ernest Trice Thompson, that defined his purposes and fixed his emphases? The stamp of a Christian home and of the finest kind of parentage manifestly could not be left out of account. In his Seminary days he was influenced

by Walter L. Lingle's emphasis on the social applications of the gospel and by the insistence of E. C. Caldwell (to whom he once referred as his "greatest teacher") that theology must be sought in the Bible without restriction by the Standards of the church and the rigid orthodoxy of the day. Since both his undergraduate work and his year of postgraduate study were taken at Union Seminary in Virginia, no other institution nor academic experience played a decisive role in the creation of Dr. Thompson's general theological point of view.

We can perhaps do no better with the question as to what formed the theology of Ernest Thompson than to say it was his dedicated spirit and questing mind in a situation that called for change. When he was a Seminary student, the Presbyterian Church in the United States still accepted the scholastic Calvinism of the third generation after the great Reformer, a position which emphasized as essential the five disputed points of the Synod of Dort and which saw as its chief enemies the theory of evolution and the tradition represented by the Socinians and Arminians. Closely allied to this theology—indeed, one aspect of it—was a view of the Scripture which rejected the critical approach and regarded inerrancy in every area and detail as essential to biblical inspiration and authority. There was, moreover, general acceptance of the doctrine of *jure divino* Presbyterianism which fixed the Presbyterian ecclesiastical order as the will of God and saw any deviation therefrom as a departure from biblical truth. In addition, there was the distinctively Southern Presbyterian doctrine of the "spirituality of the church" which denied her the right to speak on social and political issues. All in all, the dead hand of the past lay upon the mind of the church. A characteristic statement of the church's leaders and teachers of that day, as they looked backward—a statement often heard by Ernest Thompson—was that "there were giants in those days."

During Ernest Thompson's student days at the Seminary the winds of change had already begun to blow, as indicated in this country by the modernist-fundamentalist controversy, which reached its height in the years from 1918 to 1928. In this atmosphere he began to read men like Schleiermacher, Ritschl, Horace Bushnell, and Walter Rauschenbusch; he was able as a result to formulate a point of view which liberated him from the rigid, scholastic views then dominant in the church. The position

he reached did not represent the adoption of any one man's views to the extent that he could be characterized by the man's name as a disciple. He was too independent and too moderate for this, and he was too much of a Calvinist to depart significantly from the Reformed theology he understood to be Calvin's. Aided by the new insights, he modified the scholastic Calvinism of the church but remained deeply committed to the Reformed tradition.

The theological position to which he came might be described in different words as that of a "moderate liberal" or a "liberal evangelical," although both terms carry some unintended connotations. While he could not maintain the five *disputed* points of Calvinism, he cherished Calvin's own emphases on God, man, Christ, salvation, and the like. He fearlessly denied the possibility of affirming the inerrancy of Scripture in every respect, but he was true to the teaching of the Bible and, as we have seen, found in biblical exposition his first love. While he repudiated *jure divino* Presbyterianism as untenable, uncharitable, and unecumenical, he loved the Presbyterian order and over the years taught it in such fashion as to inspire a like love in others. While he could not subscribe to the doctrine of the "spirituality of the church," feeling with deep passion that the gospel has moral and social applications, he never lost sight of the individual or of the gospel that calls the individual to repentance and faith in Jesus Christ as his Lord and Savior.

Ernest Thompson's theological posture was deeply fixed in his earlier, formative years, and certainly by the late nineteen twenties. When, at the end of that decade, Neo-Orthodoxy gained its early beachheads on American shores, he was alert to its fresh ways of thinking and appreciative of its positive emphases, finding in these a welcome confirmation of the evangelical convictions which his encounters with liberal theology had never taken from him. But he showed no disposition to adopt its existentialist conception of God as the "wholly other," its revolt against reason, or its "Biblicism." Today he will take seriously the non-theistic existentialism in vogue in some theological quarters and test it expectantly for new truth, but no one who knows him will expect to find in him the "modern man" to whom the God of the Bible is no longer credible. His is still the liberal spirit but his is still, too, the warm, evangelical faith; his mind has the questing eagerness of the child but also the disciplined insight to "approve the things which are excellent."

## *The Aims of the Teacher*

To look back upon forces influential in the making of Ernest Thompson's mind is to gain a perspective from which to understand the major purposes to which his teaching has been devoted.

First, and perhaps foremost, has been his zeal to lead students into an understanding of the Bible and a dynamic experience of its message for themselves, for the church, and for society. This dominant aim seemed to be strengthened rather than diminished by his realization that the doctrine of biblical inerrancy was not essential to the Bible's being the Word of God. So complete was his dedication to the task of confronting men with a living Bible that, when he was informed in 1925 with no previous warning that the Board of Trustees had transferred him from English Bible to church history, his first impulse was to teach history for only a year and then go into the pastorate.

Along with his passion for bringing the Bible to bear on life has been his ardent desire to assist young ministers to win an evangelical theology based on the Bible but freed from thralldom to Protestant scholasticism. To sit in his history classes, particularly classes on the history of Christian thought, was to meet his liberal evangelical theology in a wealth of illustration and documentation that both convinced the mind and warmed the heart.

Another aim which has engrossed this teacher through the years has been to evoke in his students what today we should call the ecumenical spirit. Nothing else could ever have been congenial to his own spirit, and his rejection of *jure divino* Presbyterianism would seem to have been inevitable, even had he not been able to justify its repudiation on biblical, historical, and theological grounds. In unnumbered ways he has taught persuasively that the Presbyterian Church in the United States is a part of Presbyterianism in America and of the community of believers throughout the world. One of his former students writes:

> Perhaps it is his broad vision and concept of the Christian faith that has been of most helpfulness. I remember one particular incident that gave me a new insight into the total responsibility which a Christian minister should bear. Dr. Thompson quietly told the class one day that it was his custom in his devotional life to take certain maps depicting areas of the world and pray specifically about that area, its problems, and any known people residing in it. I had never thought in such personal terms about the world mission that each minister should assume as his own responsibility.

If any man, after sitting at his feet, ever emerged from Union Seminary with a narrow view of the church, he is bound at least to have been conscious of a magnificent alternative depicted with skill and urged with passion.

The final aim which must be mentioned might be felt by many to have been paramount: certainly Ernest Thompson has been committed to it, heart and soul. Those who know him will already have guessed that we refer to his unfaltering emphasis upon the application of the gospel to moral and social issues. Along with rejection of the doctrine of *jure divino* Presbyterianism he argued that one cannot justify the doctrine of the "spirituality of the church," according to which there can be no "social gospel" at all. Every student of Ernest Thompson knows that for their teacher Christian ethics applies not only to the individual but also to the church and to every institution of human society.

With these as his basic aims, Dr. Thompson must be recognized as a teacher whose primary concerns have been practical. He has given himself to influencing the theology and life of his students and, through them, of the church. This may be why his teaching has produced more church leaders than church historians—a fact for which he is surely happy. It could never be said that he has taught for the sheer joy of teaching alone, that he has been a scholar merely for the sake of scholarship, that he has sought truth only for the excitement of the search, or that, having found it, he has been content merely to contemplate it with custodial satisfaction. His scholarship has always been dedicated to action in the church and the world, to service in the Kingdom. On the other hand, one never doubted that he cherished the scholarly enterprise for its intrinsic worth and loved truth for its own sake. The felt power of high purpose and the relevance to life were all the more effective because of the uncompromised intellectual integrity. The student never had the suspicion that facts were being manipulated to make a point, that historical accuracy was subordinated to relevance, that anything was ever omitted because it did not fit the desired picture, or that emphases were misplaced for effect. One who has known him long and exceedingly well says:

> I suppose the biggest impression which came to me as a student was his ability—and willingness—to move through and present fairly all sides of an issue while, at the same time, making pretty clear where he stood in regard to it.

There was thus a remarkable blend of the scholarly and the practical in his teaching, a harmony of devotion to truth for truth's sake and truth for the Kingdom's sake.

There is added here a list of the electives offered by Dr. Thompson in the course of his teaching at the Seminary, along with the years in which they were offered, as a revelation of the areas of his interest and also as intimations of the great aims by which he was motivated.

History of Christian Thought to the Reformation, 1926/27—1932/33
History of Christian Thought—Period of Reformation, 1927/28; 1931/32—1932/33
History of Christian Thought Since the Reformation, 1926/27
History of Christian Thought, Modern Period, 1927/28—1928/29
Christian Thought After the Reformation, 1929/30
Outstanding Christian Leaders Before the Reformation, 1927/28
Outstanding Christian Leaders After the Reformation, 1927/28
Outstanding Christian Leaders, 1928/29—1932/33
The Doctrine of the Atonement, 1928/29
The Doctrine of Sin and the Atonement, 1929/30—1932/33
Modern Christian Thought, 1929/30—1958/59
Christian Classics, 1929/30—1932/33
Historical Seminar (special research papers), 1929/30—1963/64
Modern Religious Movements, 1931/32
Early Christian Thought, 1933/34—1958/59
Current Christian Thinking, 1933/34—1943/44
The Church Today, 1947/48—1953/54
Christianity Today, 1959/60—1963/64
The Ecumenical Movement, 1959/60—1963/64
Presbyterian History Seminar, 1959/60—1963/64 (on alternate years with Historical Seminar)
Modern Church History in Europe, 1962/63

## *The Methods of the Teacher*

A teacher's methods are so much a part of his fundamental attitudes, his aims, and his person that to isolate them for special mention seems often, and especially in the case of E. T. Thompson, a highly artificial procedure. On the other hand, the methods themselves throw light on the other characteristics of the teacher.

Like many other great teachers, he has relied basically on the lecture. In this way he was best able to share with the students, especially in history courses, his rich and extensive knowledge. Nowhere else could a student find such broad coverage of a subject or such insights; in later years there would be few of the books purchased while at Seminary that he would take from his shelves as often as he would draw from his files notes taken in Dr. Thompson's classes. The content of the lectures was enhanced by an amazingly lucid and logical presentation. Such was this professor's gift in ordering and outlining his materials that even the outline itself seemed often to possess the self-evidence of axiomatic truth and the force of inevitability. Clarity and precise structure were innate in his mental processes. (Should some Dante be commissioned by the powers of evil to devise the most excruciating punishment for this kindly man, he could do no better than to consign him to the limbo of disorder and forbid him to set it straight!) In addition to their meticulous arrangement his lectures were characterized by a wealth of apposite and effective illustration which captured the hearer's interest, heightened the clarity of the thought, and imparted to it a moving quality. When one remembers that his lectures were dedicated to the high, practical aims mentioned above, one can understand why his classes in history were no mere exercises in antiquarianism but rather an experience of the past in terms of the living church. A former student writes:

> The things that I remember when I think of sitting in the classroom of "Dr. E. T." are these: an encyclopedic knowledge of his subject, a tireless care in preparation, clarity and simplicity in presentation, and a humility which bordered on shyness. It is trite to say of a professor that he could make history live, but that is exactly what "Dr. E. T." did.

Another says:

> His teaching of church history was like Garrick playing Macbeth in a periwig or Shakespeare making his Romans Elizabethan gentlemen. The truth of the business was always coming to you in terms of today.

Two other characteristics of his lectures should be mentioned. One of these was the occasional flavor of delicate humor. It was never introduced for its own sake and it always took the form of the light touch. "I cannot recall his ever telling a joke or even a lighthearted anecdote, even in per-

sonal conversation," says a long-time friend. There is undeniable truth in this comment but nevertheless, when students are asked about his characteristics, they often refer to his sly humor and subtle wit. This revealed itself most frequently when he was making a historical application to a present situation, and most usually in the form of understatement. Those of us who, as one Catholic writer said of Martin Luther, have a "lack of aptness for understatement" can recognize in Ernest Thompson a master of the art. This genius lay not only in the form taken by his humor; it is native to his mode of communication, whether in serious conversation, the sustained argument of a lecture, or in ardent debate on the floor of a church court. Thus it can be described both as typical of his humor and as a distinct and second characteristic of his lectures. Always an effective method of convincing and persuading, understatement in the hands of Ernest Thompson was employed with such consummate skill that a student less "apt in understatement" than he would find himself sometimes drawn to the edge of his seat scarcely able to refrain from calling on the quiet, mild-mannered professor to speak with more vehemence and emphasis. The result, of course, was a profound and unforgettable impression on the class. What lent the ultimate effectiveness to Ernest Thompson's use of understatement was the transparent sincerity which made it obvious that he did not, strictly speaking, employ it as an art or consciously adopt it as a device for impressing his hearers. Honest to the core and with a humility that bordered on shyness, understatement was simply the natural form of his utterance, the expression of the man himself.

Dr. Thompson delivered his lectures (writes a perceptive former student) with a "quietness of manner which did not hide a passionate nature but only made it more effective." His tonal emphases were lightly explosive but still so low in volume that they produced their effect largely through contrast with the still quieter voice usually employed. An occasional impressive pause and infrequent and restrained gestures were other distinctive marks of his delivery. What left the most indelible impression was the excellence of content, the manifest sincerity, the deep personal involvement in history, both present and past, and the quiet but contagious enthusiasm.

Perhaps a rather rapid pace should be mentioned as characteristic of Dr. Thompson's delivery. This, coupled with his capacity for precise,

summarizing expression, was often the occasion of amused comment by students. One remarked that he had dropped his pencil one day while taking notes in history class and that before he could pick it up and start again he had missed the whole thirteenth century. It used to be said that Dr. Thompson's lecture was so precisely timed that he could finish it exactly as the closing bell rang, without ever having looked at his watch. He did not encourage discussion by the class, but he was always willing to be interrupted with a question and always ready to answer it in a brief but gracious manner. Students have said that this did not interfere with his schedule of lecturing because, after answering a question, he always eliminated from the next paragraph enough material to compensate for the time consumed in giving the answer. Such remarks are affectionate tributes to his meticulous preparation rather than criticisms of his classroom method. All of his students can remember animated and extended discussions when some exciting issue was before the group.

## *The Teacher Himself*

"I think it would be a mistake to heap up superlatives about him because there is something indefinable in his greatness," writes a historical scholar who acknowledges an immense debt to Ernest Thompson. Certainly we have not delineated that greatness by giving an account of his preparation for teaching, his aims, and his methods, impressive as these may be. The same writer continues:

> Like that of many great men I think much of his achievement defies description, but I think that among those who admire him there is general agreement that his influence in the church has been without parallel for many years. I also suspect that the secret of this achievement lies not so much in his teaching or preaching or writing as in his humility, his dedication, his simplicity, and his singleness of purpose. These intangible qualities, I believe, explain why he teaches and preaches with authority and why many of us remember, sometimes after many years, not only what he said but also the very spirit in which he said it.

One suspects that this judgment would meet virtually universal agreement among Dr. Thompson's former students. The ultimate influence in his teaching has been the teacher himself. For instance, another former student says:

One of the books which these lectures led me to read is A. C. McGiffert's *Martin Luther*. As I remember, the author begins with these words: "Great men need not that we praise them: the need is ours that we know them." I count it one of my most fortunate experiences to know Dr. Thompson and to have been a student under him.

Let us add one more tribute from one who has known him long and well:

I would like to say that with his mouth shut he has taught me more of what the life and temper of a Christian ought to be than I have been able to learn from any number of sermons, addresses, lectures, or homilies.

Some of the qualities that evoke such tributes have already been suggested. Another was the habit of hard work and careful preparation evident in everything he undertook. With his swift, sure intellect and retentive memory, he might have been tempted to "get by" with less than his best. But students have known that Ernest Thompson's vast erudition and brilliantly ordered thinking bespoke not only superior gifts but also an amazingly disciplined life, long and regular hours of study, and unflagging devotion to his task. Says a former student and close friend: "His own example of careful and thorough preparation of whatever he has done has, it seems to me, been a powerful influence."

The same could be said of the fact that Ernest Thompson was making history while he taught history. A minister who once sat in his classes, apropos the way in which he brought the past to life, says that "this impression was enormously increased by the valiant part he took in the major affairs of the church," and he adds, "How rare this is in a historical scholar!" There was rarely, if ever, a time during all his years of teaching history when he was not leading in some project or activity of vital significance to the church. He thus went beyond involvement in his subject to important and successful involvement in the activity with which his subject dealt; hence he taught with a kind of authority rarely possessed by a teacher.

Humility is becoming in any disciple of Jesus Christ, but in one with the ability and leadership of Ernest Thompson it becomes a powerful force. To be five minutes in his presence is to feel it, and those who have sat at his feet can hardly speak of his teaching without commenting on it. Note the climax of the following tribute:

His mind is always lucid, his attitude always reasonable, his arguments always convincing, and his humility always, for me, at once a rebuke and an inspiration.

Another writes:

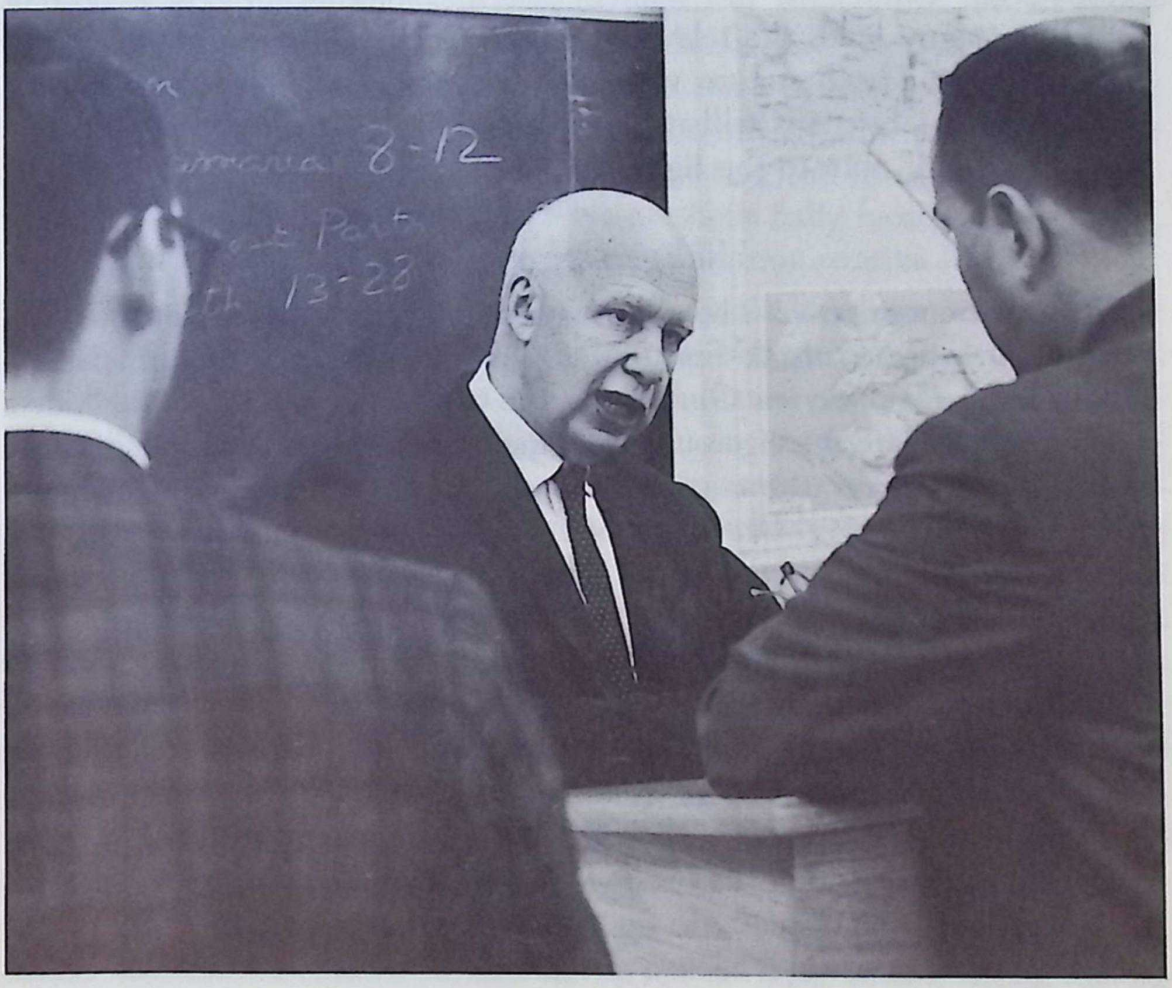
I never recall any instance in which he embarrassed a student or in any way minimized him as a person.

The words of Paul's injunction to the Philippians could be quoted as an honest description of Ernest Thompson: "In humility count others better than yourselves." Many a man has been himself humbled as this teacher, obviously superior in gifts and accomplishment, made him aware that the teacher literally counted the student better than himself. His remarkable capacity for making others feel worthy rooted in the fact that he himself actually felt them so. In the classroom such humility was completely disarming. How could a student cherish hostility toward such a person or suspect his motives? How could one be aught but receptive to greatness of intellect and knowledge where they were matched only by greatness of humility? We might add that if, in the classroom, Dr. Thompson's humility was disarming, in debate on the floor of a church court it was positively formidable.

Where one finds humility one is apt to find love, and the heart of Ernest Thompson is a classic example of their affinity. Although he does not indulge in superficial displays of affection, nor was he wont in class to put his personal feelings into words, every student knew his love in the form of unfailing kindness and readiness to help in any way possible. Those closer to him know it is as natural for him to see the best in any man and believe the best about him as it is for the sun to rise. The Christian love in his heart has nowhere been so movingly revealed as in his attitude toward those who might be called his theological and ecclesiastical enemies. In classroom presentations of the views of those from whom he differed there was conviction and feeling—but never animus, resentment, nor contempt. Even more impressive has been his demeanor when under attack for his own views: ever the charitable judgment, never the bitter word or the slighting remark. Such love has unfailingly characterized the "habitual vision of greatness" with which students have been inspired by the person of this gifted teacher. One of them, himself now a distinguished professor,

writes that it would surprise him if Ernest Thompson's students did not one and all insist that the title of a paper on him as a teacher be drawn from Ephesians 4:15, ". . . speaking the truth in love." He added, "I know of no more accurate description of 'Dr. E. T.' as teacher than those words." We agree that they are eminently appropriate either as the title or as the final word.

John Newton Thomas
*Professor of Systematic Theology*
*Union Theological Seminary in Virginia*



# ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

. . . . . *Journalist and Author*

In the midst of complex activities as teacher, preacher, and churchman, Ernest Trice Thompson has given himself also to a ministry of writing which has made a major impact on the life of his own denomination. But his writings have reached far beyond the bounds of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, communicating to a host of readers in many lands the relevance of the Christian gospel in the life of modern man. The literature which he has produced is becoming a rich heritage; to it Christians will turn again and again as they seek to understand the life of man in the light of God.

## *Religious Journals*

When we consider Dr. Thompson's place in the field of religious journalism, we are sure to think first of his prodigious literary performance as editor of the *Presbyterian Outlook*. Years ago he gathered around him a group of men who gave vigorous support to its predecessor, the *Presbyterian of the South*, while it was still under the editorship of Dr. William S. Campbell. Following Dr. Campbell's death, Dr. Thompson assumed major responsibility for the paper until, largely through his efforts, Dr. Aubrey N. Brown was secured as editor in 1943. Dr. Thompson has continued as co-editor of this vigorous church paper and as chairman of its Board of Trustees. Although the story of the *Presbyterian Outlook* involves the labors of many people, it is difficult to imagine how this publication could have survived apart from the leadership which Dr. Thompson has given it with his written contributions and his sage editorial counsel.

The full significance of the *Presbyterian Outlook* as a venture in religious journalism needs continually to be restated. Maintaining an independent church paper has always been a precarious financial venture. In recent

years the major denominations have turned to heavily subsidized publications as vehicles for program promotion. The dominant place in the affairs of the United Presbyterian Church in the United States of America achieved by *Presbyterian Life*, for instance, illustrates in an outstanding way the values that subsidized religious journalism may yield. In the Presbyterian Church in the United States, *Presbyterian Survey* has won a similar position, and high tribute can be paid to both of these and to other subsidized publications as worthy means of putting into the homes of church people information about their church's work. But publications controlled either directly or indirectly by official church boards must not be the only media through which to evaluate the work of those who dominate and direct the various church organizations. Church-supported publications may crusade for causes which have become a part of a denomination's established policies; they may not pursue editorial policies which at vital points are in sharp disagreement with the policies of the church boards. They are in no position to agitate for standpoints which have not yet received the sanction of the ecclesiastical powers that be. On the other hand, an independent publication such as the *Presbyterian Outlook* can lead in calling the attention of the church to issues which have not been fully faced and, at times, may rightly call into question the policies of administrative boards.

It would be interesting to list the many courses of action endorsed first by the *Presbyterian Outlook* which have now become the accepted policies of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Actually, the remarkable success of subsidized church publication has made the maintenance of our independent church papers the more important. Freedom of speech is an illusion unless there are channels through which those whose thinking moves in advance of the church may express their convictions. In recent years, editorials appearing in the *Presbyterian Outlook* have been unsigned, and there is no certain way of identifying those which came from Dr. Thompson's pen. We can be very certain, however, that in shaping the editorial policy of the *Presbyterian Outlook* and in the actual writing of many of its editorials Dr. Thompson has made one of his major contributions to the thought and life of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Dr. Thompson's journalistic associations were not confined to the *Presbyterian Outlook*. For many years he served as book review editor of the

*Union Seminary Review* and then in the same capacity for its successor, INTERPRETATION, until 1959. The responsibilities of a book-review editor are not light: he can easily determine the fashion in which certain books will be reviewed for his publication by careful choice of reviewers. Dr. John McKay used to say that when Dr. C. C. Morrison was editor of *The Christian Century* he would send books he did not like to men whom he knew would slay them before the Lord! In selection of books to be featured in reviews and in careful choice of reviewers, Dr. Thompson was able to give valuable guidance to the reading habits of ministers in the Presbyterian Church in the United States and to all readers of the *Union Seminary Review* and INTERPRETATION.

## *Sunday School Lessons*

In 1924, Dr. Thompson began writing a commentary on the Uniform Sunday School Lessons for the *Presbyterian Standard*. When this publication later merged with *The Presbyterian of the South,* he continued lessons for the new publication, and in the year 1964 he is still writing these fine studies for what is now the *Presbyterian Outlook*. This means that for forty years Dr. Thompson has written a weekly commentary on the Uniform Lessons for the independent church press. With the exception of a brief interval of a few months throughout these forty years, he has carried on without missing a lesson. Only those who have consistently carried a burden of writing assignments in addition to other heavy responsibilities can properly appreciate the magnitude of this accomplishment. Time must be found each week for the study preliminary to writing as well as for the actual labor of setting down words on the allotted number of pages. If in any one week it is impossible to find time to write a lesson, obviously two lessons must be written the following week. In the planning of every week's work a lesson is there to be dealt with before there is any other real freedom of time for other pressing tasks.

When Dr. Thompson began writing the weekly Sunday School lessons, he was professor of English Bible at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia, so he undertook this weekly task supported by a broad foundation of Bible study. He wrote the lessons with a clear awareness of the critical problems arising from serious study of Scripture. He never unduly emphasized the critical problems involved in a passage, but he did begin to pre-

pare the church to face with integrity and resolution those problems which inevitably come to light when men turn assiduously to the study of the written Word. Dr. Thompson's lessons were based always on sound principles of biblical interpretation: he sought faithfully to understand each passage in its setting; he strove to appropriate the message which the original writer intended to convey to his readers. But he always emphasized the relevance of a given Scripture passage to life today, and he wrote particularly with an eye on the bearing of Scripture upon the great social issues of our time. Dr. Thompson endeavored to lead the church to find in the Scriptures the word of our Lord to the life of our world. The Thompson Sunday School Lessons were written for both pupils and teachers and, like the background material in the *Earnest Worker*, they were designed to help those who taught the Uniform Lessons at all age levels. They were used in particular, however, by teachers of adult classes, who found in his expositions material that was interesting and relevant and unavailable to most of their pupils. Through his comments on the Uniform Lessons, Dr. Thompson became a teacher of teachers, and through them he was able to teach a multitude of Presbyterians each Sunday. His Sunday School lessons on the Book of Acts and the Ten Commandments have been issued in portfolio form by the *Outlook* publishers, and for them there is a sustained demand.

## *Church Courts and Committees*

One of the outstanding features of Dr. Thompson's lifework has been his service to innumerable committees of the church courts, and particularly to committees concerned with the whole field of Christian relations, at presbytery, synod, and General Assembly levels. Reports by these committees to their respective church courts have been made, of course, in the name of the committee as a whole, but to one who can savor Dr. Thompson's style it is often quite apparent how significant a role he has played in the shaping and writing of many influential statements. Many of his telling statements appearing in reports that did not bear his name have served to lift the horizons of the church, and through many such statements the church has spoken to its constituency and to the world about crucial social problems of our time.

## *His Books*

Dr. Thompson, a zealous religious journalist of great significance to his church, may have made an even broader contribution to the thought and life of our times through his books. Some of these fall clearly in the field of biblical interpretation and are related to his expositions of and comments on the Uniform Lessons. In 1946, the John Knox Press, official publishing house of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, published his *The Sermon on the Mount and Its Meaning for Today.* Dr. Thompson's point of view in this study is set forth in his Foreword: "Many Christians believe that Jesus' teachings, particularly those included in the Sermon on the Mount, present beautiful ideals which cannot possibly be realized in real life. The writer believes that they present a practicable way of life, not only for individuals, but also for society, a way to peace and happiness in this world as well as in the world to come, and that they were never more necessary than now." Here again there appears his deep regard for sound biblical scholarship and his practical concern for relevance to the life of man as an individual and as a member of society.

A companion volume to the study of the Sermon on the Mount, *The Gospel According to Mark and Its Meaning for Today,* was published in 1954. In his Preface, Dr. Thompson tells us, "This book has been written primarily for laymen, who will continue to study the Bible as it was read and accepted in the early Church. Critical questions are largely, though not altogether, ignored. The author's concern has been with the significance of Mark's Gospel for the present day." These studies on the Sermon on the Mount and the Gospel of Mark proved so popular that they were reissued by their publisher in the Aletheia Paperback series. Two smaller works by Dr. Thompson in the field of biblical interpretation were published in 1947 and 1953. The first, written for the Board of Christian Education of the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America, was a series of studies from the Gospel of Matthew entitled *One World, One Lord.* The other, *You Shall Be My Witnesses,* a series of studies in the Book of Acts, was prepared as the Bible Study Guide for the Fifth Quadrennial Convention for the youth of the Presbyterian Church in the United States.

Throughout his ministry, one of Dr. Thompson's primary concerns has been in the field of home missions. For many years he served on the Board of Church Extension of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, and

his first full length book was written in an endeavor to bring the gospel to the people of the South. The book appeared in 1934 under the title of *Presbyterian Missions in the Southern United States.* It was dedicated to "the home missionary who has toiled sacrificially and suffered hardship for the love of Christ and his fellowmen and who is mainly responsible for the advancement of God's kingdom throughout the South." The church's home mission study book for the year of its publication, it exemplifies Dr. Thompson's deep interest in the South and its people and his passion for social righteousness—those moving concerns which were to become characteristic marks of most of his later writing.

Fifteen years later, Samuel B. Lapsley, education secretary for Assembly's Home Missions, asked Dr. Thompson to revise his *Presbyterian Missions in the Southern United States.* Rather than rewrite this first work, Dr. Thompson, with the permission of the Assembly's agency, undertook to write "a book which would deal with the social and economic factors of life in the southern states and how these affect the church" (as explained in the Foreword). Published in 1950 as *The Changing South and the Presbyterian Church in the United States,* the book was the official home missions study book of the Presbyterian Church in the United States for that year.

In 1961, the Presbyterian Church in the United States observed the first 100 years of its existence as a separate denomination. Every effort was made to prevent this observance from becoming the celebration of a sad division in the Presbyterian Church. While the heritage of the southern branch of the Presbyterian Church was given proper consideration, the keynote of the centennial year was the destiny of the church to move ahead in fidelity to the heritage it celebrated. Dr. Thompson was chosen as the man in the Southern Presbyterian communion best able to take this forward look. He carried out his assignment in a book titled *Tomorrow's Church, Tomorrow's World.* Here again we have a volume true to his consistent concern that the church understand the nature of the world in which we live and the place of the church in our changing society.

Dr. Thompson's sustained interest in the field of Christian relations may be defined as his effort to discover the meaning of the gospel in the social structure of the nation. This interest has issued in a high regard for the work of the church in the field of home missions and a deep concern for

efforts in personal evangelism. It has been clear to him that without Christians there can be no Christian action, but he has always moved beyond the evangelism of the individual to the wider implications of the Christian faith for the orders of society—for the rights of the laboring man for justice for Negroes, Indians, and other minority groups, for an understanding of the spiritual and moral foundations of world order. This concern manifested itself specifically in a small book entitled *Bases of World Order,* which developed from a seminar conducted under his chairmanship at the Montreat Leadership School in 1944. Dr. Thompson and his associates served as editors of this volume, and it is impossible to know just the portions of it which actually came from the chairman's pen. The book is a serious attempt to come to grips with the spiritual, the political, the economic, and the social bases of a just and abiding world order. A further expression of Dr. Thompson's deep concern for the relationship of church and society is another brief work, *Jesus and Citizenship,* which he published in 1956. It is based on the conviction that we may learn much from "Christ's teaching and example regarding our present-day obligations as citizens of our particular community, state, and nation." The book's chapters treat of such themes as war and peace, plenty and want, sickness and health, brotherhood and race.

In 1943, Dr. Thompson delivered the Stone Lectures at Princeton Theological Seminary. Lying in the field of American church history, the primary area of Dr. Thompson's seminary teaching, these lectures examined the changes which have taken place in American preaching. The volume which resulted from these lectures, *Changing Emphases in American Preaching,* analyzes five representative teachers of the nineteenth century. In his consideration of Horace Bushnell, Dr. Thompson discusses the beginning of American liberalism as well as the rise of modern Christian education. Examining the life and work of Washington Gladden and Walter Rauschenbusch, he returns again to his constant concern for the implications of Christianity for the social order. Published by The Westminster Press, this is the only major book of Dr. Thompson's published by a company other than the publishing house of the Presbyterian Church in the United States. Cameron Deans, as manager of the Board of Christian Education, expressed his appreciation on numerous occasions for the loyalty which Dr. Thompson showed to the publishing ventures of his own

denomination. It is most appropriate that the fund set up as a memorial to Cameron Deans has now made possible the publication of Dr. Thompson's major work, *Presbyterians in the South.*

Dr. Thompson's never failing interest in the relevance of the gospel for the structure of society came to sharp focus in a book of 48 pages published in 1961, with the title, *The Spirituality of the Church.* This small work contains the substance of two addresses originally delivered before the student bodies of Union Theological Seminary and the Presbyterian School of Christian Education, which consider the formulation of the doctrine of the spirituality of the church as deriving originally from the Southern Presbyterian Church's situation in a society dominated by slavery. Dr. Thompson declares vigorously the urgency of a *re*-formulation of this doctrine if our church is to become relevant to the world today. We shall limit ourselves to one quotation from this highly significant little book:

> For 75 years, three-fourths of our history as a denomination, from 1861 to approximately 1935, the generally accepted view of the Presbyterian Church in the United States was that its mission was limited to evangelism and to the fostering of individual or family morality. Given by divine commission, its task was conceived to be in the strictest sense of the word, spiritual, that is, evangelistic and pietistic. During this period the moral and ethical problems about which we showed the most concern, almost the only problems on which the General Assembly offered any guidance for its members, were the problems of Sabbath observance, of intemperance, of worldly amusements—dancing, theater going and card playing; and from time to time our women were exhorted to keep silent in the mixed assemblies of the church. During this period the church had little or nothing to say about the social, racial, economic, national, and international problems that were peculiar to our region, or that we in the South faced with the rest of our nation—nothing about worsening race relations, about the Jim Crow laws, which are comparatively recent, for example; nothing about worsening industrial relations, about the intolerable conditions that developed in many of the mill towns of the Carolinas, or the coal mines of Kentucky and West Virginia; nothing about the responsibility of Christian men to apply the principles of Christian love and justice to all the relationships of life. This was not conceived to be the task of the church.

In this one passage may be felt the mingled passion for social righteousness of an Old Testament prophet and the compassion for people of a New Testament evangelist.

## *Major Literary Contributions*

For the greater part of his ministry, Dr. Thompson has been the professor of church history and church polity at Union Theological Seminary in Virginia. It is appropriate, therefore, that the two major contributions from his pen be in the field of church history. The writing of history is not merely a recital of the story of what is past; the historian must interpret as well as recount events. When a new ideology achieves power over the life of a people, the history of that people will be rewritten to bring it into harmony with the point of view of the powers proclaiming that ideology. Consider, for example, the differing accounts of the War Between the States as written from a southern or northern point of view. Or consider how different is the history of Europe written from a Catholic point of view from a history of the same period produced by a devout Protestant.

In his major work, *Presbyterians in the South,* Dr. Thompson tells the story against the background of his wide understanding of the meaning of the Christian faith and its out-workings in our country. He writes with the objectivity of the trained historian but selects, interprets, and evaluates in terms of his own basic presuppositions. Thus he gives us the book that will be for the foreseeable future the definitive history of Presbyterians in the Southern United States. The first volume, published in 1963, brings the story up to the time of the Civil War; the second will carry the narrative forward from the organization of the Presbyterian Church in the Confederate States to the present. Dr. Thompson has brought to the writing of this history an amazing knowledge of contemporary documents. He has supported his statements with quotations rich in human interest, and the volume holds the attention of the reader in a remarkable way. The church is permanently in debt to this great historian for the volume already published and looks eagerly to the appearance of the second. This great history will stand as the monumental accomplishment of a dedicated and disciplined student of church history.

Perhaps Volume 2 of *Presbyterians in the South* might already have been in the hands of readers but for the fact that, in the midst of his labors on this work, Dr. Thompson consented to prepare the book on church history for the second year of the adult program of the Covenant Life Curriculum. History written for church school study must differ, of course, from history

written for the secular reader. In the Covenant Life Curriculum church history is but part of the witness of the church to the mighty acts of God in history, and must become an instrument of continuing encounter of the church with her Lord. Long dependent on the Uniform Bible Lessons at the adult level, adults have little knowledge of the story of the church at large as it has moved across time. Dr. Thompson's book, to be called *Through the Ages,* will contain for both pupil and teacher the material for a full year of study. The book will be available for churches using the Covenant Life Curriculum in the fall of 1965. More than 200,000 copies of *Through the Ages,* it is expected, will be studied by adult members of the churches making use of the Covenant Life Curriculum. It is good to know that the man who has given so much of his life to the teaching of church history to generations of Seminary students has been chosen to write this book to introduce to the adults of the churches knowledge of their heritage in the history of the church at large.

## *Finally . . .*

The record of Dr. Thompson's contributions as journalist and author is an amazing one when it is remembered that all his writing has been accomplished in a full schedule of teaching, preaching, and day-in, day-out responsibilities of an active churchman. Only the man himself can fully know the inner discipline which made such prodigious achievements possible. But we who read his writings know that through them the church has been led to a fresh encounter with its Lord and, increasingly, to a spirit ready to move in obedience to the commands of that living Lord, in relevant Christian witness in the midst of the life of this world.

Holmes Rolston
*Editor in chief, Division of Christian Teaching of the Board of Christian Education, Presbyterian Church in the United States*

# ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

. . . . . *Churchman*

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*And the Theological Outlook and Ethical Concern of the Presbyterian Church in the United States*

CHRISTIAN FAITH is radically historical. God calls particular men living in a particular time and place to serve him. The proper vocation of churchmen and theological seminary professors is to serve God in their own historical situation, not in some ideal history they dream about, or in some past history which they wish were still present, or in some unrealized future they ardently desire. There is no perennial Christian obedience which lifts the Christian out of the place where he stands in the providence of God. Men have attempted, it is true, to evade the responsibility of being historical men, put in a particular time and place; but the radical historicity of the Bible is sufficient reminder that salvation is found not in escape from history but in obedience within history.

Ernest Trice Thompson became a member of the faculty of Union Theological Seminary in 1922. The forty-two years which have now passed belong by any account to an era when history was very real and intense. This history can be considered from many points of view. It encompassed war and economic depression. It experienced social revolution and the break-up of old, established patterns of life. It included the beginning of the time of atomic power. It was an era of religious revival and declension. In the Presbyterian Church in the United States it was the time when, above all else, thinking men were confronted by the fact of the nineteenth century and the reality of the modern world. To be sure, men had known about Marx, Darwin, Freud, Schleiermacher, and Strauss; but these names were bits of information on the top of the mind, not realities in the depths of personal existence and the life of the church.

Ernest Trice Thompson more than any other man of his time was involved in this confrontation and in the ensuing transition in the life of the Presbyterian Church. For this reason it is appropriate that his retirement should be celebrated by taking note of this aspect of the denomination's history during the last four decades. The significance of a professorship cannot be fully assessed at the date of retirement, and there is something presumptuous in all such judgments. However, it is reasonable to say that one of the primary contributions of Dr. E. T. Thompson, if not his greatest, and the one in which he excelled all his contemporaries, is that he insisted that the church recognize the fact of its existence in the twentieth century.

## *Nineteenth Century Developments*

Periodization is a difficult but important problem in historical methodology. It is significant not only for methodology and the mastery of material but also for content and meaning. The periodization of history, world history as well as church history, reflects one's understanding of that history and of one's role in the present. For this reason it is always somewhat arbitrary and dependent upon the viewpoint of the historian.

In world history we have learned that the traditional, linear periodization of history as ancient, medieval, and modern from the point of western civilization does justice neither to world history nor to contemporary history in the West. Certainly it is meaningless for other civilizations. In many ways it prevents a proper evaluation of the past or our own relation to it.

In church history, likewise, the traditional divisions of ancient, medieval, and modern are no longer wholly acceptable. More than fifty years ago Ernst Troeltsch questioned the significance of the Reformation as the beginning of the modern world and of modern church history. In his judgment the classic Reformers belonged to the medieval world. Even if he underestimated the contributions of the Reformers, there can be no doubt today that the really decisive break in the history of Christian thought came not with the Reformation but with the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century. Schleiermacher, the first theologian of major stature to take the Enlightenment seriously, has been judged a pivotal figure in the history of theology and of the church for this very reason.

The period which begins roughly about 1775 and extends to 1914 was no monolithic whole. It includes, for example, the great missionary movement of modern times that requires three volumes in Professor Latourette's history to record and that entitles the nineteenth century to be called "The Great Century" in Christian missions. For many Christians, life was stable, faith secure, and the outlook hopeful.

Nevertheless, the nineteenth century brought into sharp focus many movements, some long in the making, that would threaten the foundations of Christian faith and practice and would require a radical restatement of Christian theology and ethics. After the nineteenth century was actually experienced, Christian theology and ethics could never be the same.

Among the developments of the nineteenth century which challenged the Christian community and the Christian theologian were the Scientific Revolution, the Industrial Revolution, the development and practice of critical historical studies, confrontation with other religions and cultures, and the secularization of life, that is, the emancipation of life from the domination of the church and theology. In addition, there was revolt against the past and all external authority. Immanuel Kant was the preeminent spokesman for the Enlightenment when he wrote in answer to the question "What is the Enlightenment?":

> Free Thought is the advance of man beyond the state of voluntary immaturity. By immaturity is meant inability to use his own understanding except under the guidance of another. The immaturity is voluntary when the cause of it is not want of intelligence, but of resolution and courage to use it without another's guidance. *Sapere aude!* Dare to use thy *own* understanding! is therefore the motto of Free Thought. If the question be asked, "Do we live in a free-thinking age?" the answer is, "No; but we live in an age of free-thought." (From the essay, "What Is the Enlightenment?")

The Scientific Revolution represents a break in human life and thought whose significance can hardly be overestimated. Herbert Butterfield has written:

> Since that revolution overturned the authority in science not only of the middle ages but of the ancient world—since it ended not only in the eclipse of scholastic philosophy but in the destruction of Aristotelian physics—it outshines everything since the rise of Christianity and reduces the Renaissance and Reformation to the rank of mere episodes, mere internal displacements, within the system of medieval

Christendom. Since it changed the character of men's habitual mental operations even in the conduct of the non-material sciences, while transforming the whole diagram of the physical universe and the very texture of human life itself, it looms so large as the real origin both of the modern world and of the modern mentality that our customary periodization of European history has become an anachronism and an encumbrance. (From *The Origins of Modern Science.*)

Sigmund Freud understood quite well the history in which he saw his own work as something of a climax:

Humanity has, in the course of time, had to endure from the hands of science two great outrages upon its naive self-love. The first was when it realized that our earth was not the centre of the universe, but only a tiny speck in a world-system of a magnitude hardly conceivable. . . . The second was when biological research robbed man of his peculiar privilege of being specially created, and relegated him to a descent from the animal world, implying an ineradicable animal nature in him. . . . But man's craving for grandiosity is now suffering the third and most bitter blow from present-day psychological research, which is endeavouring to prove to the "ego" of each one of us that he is not even master in his own house, but that he must remain content with the veriest scraps of information about what is going on unconsciously in his own mind. . . . This is the kernel of the universal revolt against our science. (From *Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis.*)

The Industrial Revolution not only posed problems of practical strategy but also of theology and ethics. The Christian community had existed in a dominantly rural and agricultural culture. Increasingly in the nineteenth century it found itself in an urban and industrial context. Christians who for centuries had been struggling to learn the meaning of the command "Love your neighbor" in a rural and agricultural setting now had to learn the meaning of this command in a radically new situation. The changed situation was reflected in the new ethical concern of the church toward the use of alcoholic beverages. It was also reflected in the inadequacy of traditional Christian morality to serve as a guide for Christian behavior in the newly complicated affairs of economic and industrial life. For example, it may be difficult for the owner of a farm that employs ten men to know what it means to love one's neighbor. It is far more difficult for the manager of a large business to know what it means to love one's neighbor. The social gospel was the attempt of the church to discover what it means to obey Jesus Christ in an industrial and urban society.

It is significant that Karl Marx, one of the great figures of the nineteenth century, challenged the church on ethical as well as philosophical grounds. Christianity was for him bad morals as well as bad theology. "Man makes religion, religion does not make man." Moral ideas are derived from economic relations. In short, Marx charged that religion was the opiate of the people, serving the cause of injustice rather than justice. Religion is thus a useful instrument of privileged people. There were some, even in the church, who seemed determined to prove Marx's analysis true.

Critical methods of historical study were not invented in the nineteenth century, but they were honed to a fine edge by the historians of that century. Moreover, with the advance of secularism the Christian religion and the biblical documents were studied as any other historical phenomena. Historical study threatened to demonstrate that Christianity was only one of the religions of mankind or a stage, above magic but below science, in man's development. No one could predict in advance the consequence of critical historical studies of the biblical documents. History, therefore, became a real test of the courage of faith, especially for those who believed that the life of the mind is the service of God.

The Age of Discovery had brought Christians in contact with the religions of mankind in new and dramatic ways. This confrontation became even clearer in the nineteenth century. If the nineteenth century became the great missionary century for some, for others it was the time when the history of religions supplanted Christian dogmatics as the concern of many thoughtful persons.

Secularism, the emancipation of life from the domination of theology and the church, likewise became ever more characteristic of the modern world. In 1615 Galileo had protested that theology could not dictate subject matter and results of other studies.

> I think that in discussions of physical problems we ought to begin not from the authority of scriptural passages, but from sense-experiences and necessary demonstrations; for the Holy Bible and the phenomena of nature proceed alike from the divine Word, the former as the dictate of the Holy Ghost and the latter as the observant executrix of God's command. (From *Dialogue Concerning the Two Chief World Systems—Ptolemaic and Copernican.*)

Even the liberal Calvinist, Hugo Grotius, wrote his international law with the intention that it would stand even if there were no God. Vast areas of

life such as education that had once been the domain of theological and ecclesiastical control gained their autonomy. Here the church was confronted with the formation of attitudes and relationships to these autonomous areas of life. What is the worth of achievements wrought not only outside the church but by the hands of men who do not acknowledge the faith? Here was a new form of the old question "What has Jerusalem to do with Athens?"

The theological community reacted to the nineteenth century in two basic ways. On the one hand, the liberals sought to assimilate the wisdom of the nineteenth century and to restate the Christian message in such a way that a man could be a Christian and a modern man at the same time. The great danger was that in assimilating the wisdom of the nineteenth century the Christian message would be lost. Fundamentalists, on the other hand, sought to defy the nineteenth century. They either declared that the "assured results" of the nineteenth century were not true or that they did not apply to the faith and documents of the church. There was a third group, perhaps best called "conservatives," who simply did their theological work without any reference to the intellectual and social developments of the nineteenth century.

The theological work of the church entered a new era with the end of the First World War and the publication of Karl Barth's *Commentary on Romans*. Barth offered the prospect of going beyond the liberal-fundamentalist debates. On the one hand, Barth accepted as fact the intellectual and social developments of the nineteenth century; on the other, he reaffirmed the classic Christian affirmations. While accepting the science, the critical historical methodology, and the ethical demands of the social and economic developments of the past one hundred years, he still found it possible to proclaim the majesty and transcendence of God and the radical uniqueness of the Word of God in Jesus Christ. Thus, the great deliverance that Barth brought was the hope of getting beyond the nineteenth century theologically and ethically not by denying or defying that century but by going through it and by taking it seriously.

A second stage in "contemporary theology" was set by Reinhold Niebuhr's publication of *Moral Man and Immoral Society* in 1932. As Barth had gone beyond the nineteenth century debates with reference to the doctrine of God and of revelation, so Niebuhr understands man's predicament and

problem of ethics in a new context. He draws upon insights of Augustine, Luther, and Calvin without denying the achievements of liberalism.

The third development may be dated with Bultmann's essay "New Testament and Mythology" in 1941. Bultmann, as Albert Outler has written, at least raised the right question: "How can the Gospel be spoken in the modern world?" At this point a whole series of additional questions press for an answer: "What is the Gospel?" "How does God act in the created order?" "What are the data on which our Christian faith and hope reliably depend?"

The distinctive characteristic of theology, after the early Barth in theological sequence, is that it goes beyond the theology of the nineteenth century without denying the achievements of that century.

## *The Nineteen Twenties*

Theological time is not the same as chronological time. Chronological time is the same for all people at any particular moment. Theological time differs. Thus it is impossible simply to identify a chronological period as the "Post-Protestant Era" or the "Post-Christian Era" or the "Age of Enlightenment." Men live in different times theologically, intellectually, and socially, even though the chronological time is the same.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States during the nineteen twenties, insofar as its theological time can be judged from its most decisive ecclesiastical decisions, lived theologically in a pre-Enlightenment world. There were notable exceptions to this judgment. Columbia Theological Seminary established the Perkins Professorship of Natural Science in its Relation to Revealed Religion in 1859, the very year Darwin's *Origin of the Species* appeared. James Woodrow, the first occupant of the chair, had earned a Ph.D., *summa cum laude,* from Heidelberg University. Woodrow, however, was ousted from his professorship in 1886, and the future belonged to his opponent, John L. Girardeau. During the nineteen twenties there were individuals like Walter L. Lingle who took the achievements of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century seriously, though with caution. Others, such as Hay Watson Smith and Charles Diehl, were less cautious. Nevertheless, the general statement stands that the theological outlook and the ethical concern of the Presbyterian Church in the United States during the nineteen twenties was pre-Enlightenment in orientation.

The scientific orientation of the church was revealed in the action of the General Assembly in 1924 in response to an overture from Mecklenburg Presbytery. It reaffirmed the action which it had taken in 1886 in connection with the dispute concerning Professor James Woodrow. This action was as follows:

*Whereas,* the General Assembly of our Church has declared itself upon the question of evolution in the following deliverance:

The Church remains at this time sincerely convinced that the Scriptures as truly and authoritatively expounded in our Confession of Faith and Catechisms teach:

That Adam and Eve were created body and soul by immediate acts of Almighty power, thereby preserving a perfect race unity.

That Adam's body was directly fashioned by Almighty God without any natural animal parentage of any kind out of matter previously created from nothing, and that any doctrine at any variance therewith is a dangerous error, inasmuch as in the methods of interpreting Scripture it must demand, and in the consequence which by fair implication it will involve, it will lead to the denials of doctrines fundamental to the faith . . .

The Presbytery of Mecklenburg respectfully overtures the General Assembly to reaffirm the above deliverance and to publish it to the world as our present position. We recommend an affirmative answer and do so reaffirm our convictions and do hereby publish them to the world. (*Minutes of the General Assembly,* 1924, p. 64.)

In 1922 Hay Watson Smith's monograph, *Evolution and Presbyterianism,* took the position that evolution is a fact with which the church must come to terms and that this can be done without violence to the integrity of the faith. This particular pamphlet and the significance of evolution for Christian faith were factors in the heresy charges which were brought against the author in 1929. The charges were not sustained, but the case was not finally settled until 1934.

The theological orientation of the church was that of seventeenth-century Calvinism. This was the theology that was taught in the seminaries. Turretin and Wolleb, the Synod of Dort, and the Westminster Assembly set the pattern for the prevailing theology. This theology represented theological skills of the highest order; but it was also a theology which was written in the seventeenth century, when the theological options and when the language and outlook of men were decisively different from those open and meaningful after 1914.

It is worth noting that this theology had marked variations from the theology of John Calvin. The "system" of the Westminster Assembly, especially the Shorter Catechism, is different from Calvin's *Catechism* and *Institutes*. Desire for logical precision, implicit confidence that theological problems can be solved by logic, comprehensiveness of theological knowledge, and preoccupation with problems of formal authority are characteristics of this theology. It tempted men to believe that they could be justified by theology rather than by faith. It forgot that theology itself stands under justification by grace through faith. It is not without reason that in the nineteen twenties no seminary in the denomination owned all of Calvin's published works or a really substantial collection of secondary works about him and his theology. With the Westminster documents and some subsequent statements of seventeenth-century Reformed theology, it was apparently felt that Calvin was not really needed.

The seventeenth-century theological orientation was supported by ecclesiastical action. In 1925 the General Assembly added to the ordination vow the pledge that one would on his own initiative make known to the proper church court any change occurring after the taking of the vow. Presbyteries overtured the General Assembly to specify the doctrines which were essential to subscription to the Confession. The overtures culminated in an *in thesi* deliverance in 1939:

> The General Assembly hereby declares that it regards the acceptance of the infallible truth and divine authority of the Scriptures, and of Christ as very and eternal God who became man by being born of a virgin, who offered Himself a sacrifice to satisfy divine justice and reconcile us to God, who rose from the dead with the same body with which he suffered and who will return again to judge the world, as being involved in the ordination vows to which we subscribe." (*Minutes of the General Assembly*, 1939, p. 71.)

One of the charges made against Hay Watson Smith illustrates this point. He had contended that the Confession was three hundred years old and was bound by the history in which it was written. His chief opponent replied that it was as modern as its approval by Thornwell and Palmer and its adoption in 1861, and as modern as Smith's own ordination vow.

Efforts to modify portions of the Confession and Catechism began in 1934. Certain changes were made, but for the most part they were of a very minor nature; major revisions were defeated, even though approved by

the requisite number of presbyteries. It should be noted that this was an effort to modify seventeenth-century theology, not to think through the meaning of Christian faith in the new intellectual context. In 1941 two chapters, "Of the Holy Spirit" and "Of the Gospel," were added to the Confession. They remain in the Confession in awkward relation to the rest of the Confession, with which they agree in neither idiom nor content. The addition of the chapters reflects a feeling of theological uneasiness but a failure of nerve to face the task of theological construction in a post-Enlightenment world. The remoteness of this task was well indicated by the fact that dispensationalism was a major theological concern of the denomination, as late as the Assembly of 1944, when it was declared out of accord with the standards of the church.

The Industrial Revolution did not revolutionize the mind of the Presbyterian Church in the nineteen twenties. The pronouncements of the Federal Council of Churches on social, economic, and political affairs drew vigorous protests. In 1927 the General Assembly declared:

> In response to Overtures from East Hanover and West Hanover Presbyteries, respectively, requesting the Assembly to withdraw from membership in the Federal Council of the Churches of Christ in America, we recommend that these overtures be answered in the negative. At the same time we take occasion again to restate our historical position regarding the spiritual character of the Church, its duty being, under its sovereign Lord and Head, to preach the Gospel to every creature and not settle matters of a civil or political nature, and that the Assembly urge our representative in the Council to continue to witness against all actions and activities of the Council that transgress the principles above stated.
>
> . . .
>
> But while we believe in peace, good will and love between man and man, nation and nation, and race and race throughout the world, while we believe that war is a curse absolutely out of harmony with the Christian religion whose heart is love, and while we hope, work and pray for the coming of the day when "men shall beat their swords into plowshares and their spears into pruning hooks and the nations shall learn war no more," still we cannot approve the methods recommended to us by the Secretary of the Council, though we aim at the attainment of the same glorious end.
>
> We believe that peace, good will and love in a warless world are not to be achieved by passing resolutions however beautifully and strongly expressed, but rather by the regeneration of the hearts of men by the Holy Spirit, and that the Holy Spirit accomplishes His work by renewing the hearts of men through the preached word. (*Minutes of the General Assembly*, 1927, pp. 39-40.)

The Presbyterian Church in the United States withdrew from the Federal Council in 1931. One of the chief issues was the Federal Council's involvement in a statement on birth control. The membership statistics seem to indicate that Presbyterians did practice in their personal lives what they condemned the Federal Council for speaking about in public. Nevertheless, the traditional doctrine of the spirituality of the church was clearly in the ascendancy. There was little awareness that in an urban and industrial society man's predicament is, increasingly, not simply that he as an individual is a sinner but also that he is a participant in a sinful social order.

The prevalent definition of a Christian was pietistic: A Christian is a man who says his prayers, reads his Bible, goes to church, is faithful to his wife, is given neither to profanity nor drunkenness. All that pietism says a Christian ought to be is surely true. Nevertheless, it allows a Christian to be irresponsible in business, social, and political life. No Calvinist can for long be content with a pietistic definition of a Christian. For Calvin intended not simply that individuals in Geneva should be Christians but that Geneva should be Christian, and wherever Calvinists have gone they have carried with them the vision of the Holy Commonwealth. Nevertheless, a doctrine of the church which on principle took no direct responsibility for society and a pietistic definition of a Christian prevailed in the nineteen twenties, in tension with the Reformed heritage.

The confrontation of Christian faith with other living religions was a pressing concern of the church in the nineteen twenties. The Jerusalem International Missionary Council meeting in 1928 disavowed missionary imperialism and was concerned with the positive significance of other living religions, a theme which likewise received attention at Madras in 1938. In the United States many Christians were rethinking missions, and the Laymen's Missionary Inquiry (1930-1932) provoked heated debate. Yet there is little evidence that the significance of other religions for Christian faith was a pressing concern of Presbyterians. Even at this date there is no trained scholar in the field of the comparative study of religions on any of the denomination's theological faculties or even in the life of the church.

The methods of critical historical study were generally rejected or ignored in the study of the Bible. Issues raised by this methodology frequently appear in the pamphlets published in the Hay Watson Smith case and in the charges brought against Charles Diehl. They became, in the thirties, one of the focal points of the criticism of Ernest Trice Thompson.

The conclusion is unavoidable. In the nineteen twenties the Presbyterian Church was living in a pre-Enlightenment world. There were exceptions, but they did not set the dominant pattern of the church's life. Theologically and ethically, at best, new patches were being placed on old garments, and new wine was occasionally poured into old wineskins.

## *The New Outlook*

In the nineteen thirties a new outlook was increasingly discernible in the life of the church. Taking seriously the achievements of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century, the change brought with it new possibilities in theology and ethics. In this transition Ernest Trice Thompson was a vigorous and tireless workman.

A committee on Social and Moral Welfare was established by the General Assembly in 1934. This committee grew out of overtures from a number of church courts, including the Synod of Virginia, where a similar committee had been at work. Dr. Thompson had been involved in the creation of the Synod of Virginia committee. He was a member of the Assembly's committee and wrote its first report, which was largely a justification of the committee's existence.

> It is the historic position of the Presbyterian Church in the United States that the power of the Church is exclusively spiritual, that the provinces of Church and State are perfectly distinct, and the one has no right to usurp the jurisdiction of the other. To this historic position of our Church we give our unqualified assent.
>
> We believe, however, that the Church in fulfillment of its spiritual function must interpret and present Christ's ideal for the individual and for society, must warn men of the presence of sin and of its effects in individual life and in the social life, must offer Christ to the individual and to society as the only Revealer of God and the only Redeemer of mankind, must seek with the spiritual weapons at its disposal to establish His Lordship in the hearts of all men, and over every area of human life.
>
> To this task we are summoned by apostles and prophets, and by the Master Himself. Nothing less than this, we are convinced, is included in His teaching, in His acts, and in His last great commission to the Church: "Go ye into all the world and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all things whatsoever I have commanded you." (R.V.)
>
> According to this commission our first duty as followers of Jesus is to win men to Christ, baptizing them into the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, that is to bring them into saving relationships with God the Father, God the Son and God the Holy Spirit. Since that is so, the exercise of some form of evange-

lism, by which men are reconciled unto God through the life and death of Jesus Christ, and the cultivation of habits of public and private worship by which fellowship with God is maintained in the human soul are and must always remain the chief functions of the Church. Other organizations deal with man's environment, both political and economic. The Church cannot remain indifferent to these areas of life, inasmuch as man cannot be separated from his environment, and there must always be mutual interaction between the two. Nonetheless the primary mission of the Church is to the individual. The greatest service that it can render to him, the greatest contribution that it can make to society is to bring men and women into saving relationship with God (through evangelism), and to maintain and develop the soul's fellowship with God (through worship).

Evangelism, however, is only the beginning of the Church's task. It is the foundation on which all other work of the Church must be built, but it cannot stop with the foundation. Worship is essential if fellowship with God is to be maintained, but worship is only a part of man's duty to God. In His last commission Jesus commanded us to make disciples, baptizing them into the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit; He also commanded us to teach them to observe all things whatsoever He had commanded us.

In accordance with this command the Church must teach men to love God with all their heart, with all their soul, with all their mind, and with all their strength. It must teach men, in other words, to set their affections supremely upon Him, to surrender their wills wholly unto him, to seek first, above all worldly aims and above all worldly ambitions, His Kingdom and His righteousness, and to do so in the midst of our present materialistic environment, in spite of the constant temptations that come to us to lower our ideals to meet the ideals of the world.

But this is not enough. In accordance with Christ's command the Church must also teach men to love their neighbors as themselves, and to do so in every area of life, in the social sphere, as well as in the individual sphere, in the home, in the school, and in the Church, in industry and in politics, in racial contacts, and in international affairs.

In the midst of our present competitive economic structure, our intensely nationalistic world order, in the midst of a society where greed for money and for power, lust for pleasure and sensual enjoyment tend to drag the spirit of man down to the level of the beast, and to degrade and exploit the bodies and souls of multitudes of helpless men, women and children, the Church must teach men to live in accordance with the teachings of Jesus, to practice the Golden Rule in all the relations of life, to work as well as to pray that God's will may be done on earth as it is in heaven.

. . .

As stated in the Virginia Synod report, referred to us by the last Assembly, the Church must take cognizance of existing moral and social problems; it must study and endeavor to understand their causes, effects and cure; it must interpret and apply

the teachings of the Bible and the principles of Christianity to the solution of these problems and to the amelioration of distressing conditions of life.

The final end which the Church seeks to accomplish, in accordance with its great commission, is to make disciples of all the nations. It cannot be content merely to gather a group of disciples out of the nations, or to build and maintain Churches which will develop the spiritual lives of their own members, though this is an essential part of its program. It must seek to win all men to Jesus, and to teach them to live as Christians in all the relations of life. In other words, the Church cannot rest its efforts until all men, in all nations, are seeking to follow Christ, not only in their individual lives, but also in their corporate lives, and to build their economic life, their political life and their international life, as well as their individual lives on the teachings of Jesus. It cannot rest until Jesus is Lord of all men, and until He is also Lord of all life. (*Minutes of the General Assembly*, 1935, pp. 93-94.)

The second Social and Moral Welfare report was comprehensive. It had paragraphs on the threat of war, the need of economic justice, the race problem, gambling, the liquor question, and recreational problems. These two reports were signs of a new awareness of the responsibility of Christians in the modern world. The Presbyterian Church was now engaged in a form of social action which would not have been possible a decade earlier. Many in the church continued to think that the very existence of the committee was a violation of the character of the church, but the committee and its successors have survived to this day. On one social issue the church was more alive in the nineteen thirties than it is today: the issue of war and peace.

Critical, historical study of the Scriptures, as a necessary means of knowing what the Scripture actually says and as obedience to the God who commands that his servants shall love him with their minds, began to establish itself in the life of the church in the nineteen thirties. One evidence of the change is found in articles that began appearing in the *Union Seminary Review* in the late twenties. The editorial policy of INTERPRETATION, its successor, was unequivocally committed to reverent, critical, historical study of Scripture from its first publication in 1947. The General Assembly gave its approval to this method implicitly in its adoption of the study on marriage and divorce in 1956 and explicitly in its support of *The Layman's Bible Commentary* in 1960.

This issue was very intimately involved in the life and work of Ernest Trice Thompson. The initial attack upon him was launched as a result

of an article which he had written, pointing to union with the Presbyterian Church in the United States of America but also involving issues of biblical interpretation. Unquestionably, his views on social issues inspired many theological criticisms. Nevertheless, the actual charges that were made against him focus upon issues arising out of the critical and historical study of the Scriptures.

The fact that Professor Thompson survived these attacks is of incalculable importance for the life of the denomination. East Hanover Presbytery and the Synod of Virginia stood firmly behind him. The General Assembly refused to take action against him or the Seminary. President Benjamin Rice Lacy of Union Theological Seminary firmly and emphatically supported him. No one has yet fully assessed the significance of Professor Thompson's courage and integrity in the face of attacks and of President Lacy's unequivocal decision to support this member of the Seminary faculty. It is safe to say that the history of the Seminary and the Presbyterian Church in the United States would have been significantly different from what it has been if either had faltered.

Professor Thompson was not the first to introduce critical and historical methods of biblical study; he had many like-minded colleagues as well. Yet the vigor with which he was attacked, even until the late fifties, indicates that in the judgment of those who deplored this change, he was responsible above all others.

The ecumenical movement became in the nineteen twenties and thirties another issue that revealed a man's basic theological orientation. The ecumenical movement had developed after 1850 in the context of the missionary movement and against the background of the rise of such movements as communism and national socialism, as well as the general secularization of life. Along with Christian ethics and the critical study of Scripture, it was the third focus in Ernest Trice Thompson's personal commitment as a churchman.

In the nineteen twenties the Presbyterian Church in the United States had been remarkably open to some form of federal union. In fact, one Assembly committee regarded federal union as so certain that an answer to the question of a centralized office for the denomination was unnecessary. Federal union, however, was not achieved, as there was much opposition on theological grounds. In 1937 the General Assembly established a perma-

nent committee to enter into conversations with other Presbyterian churches with regard to union. This resolution began the conversations that ended with the defeat of the union proposal in 1954-1955.

The Presbyterian Church in the United States returned to the Federal Council of Churches in 1941. In 1937-1938 the presbyteries had voted forty-eight to thirty-eight with two abstaining against membership, indicating the closely divided opinion. Nevertheless, in spite of opposition in subsequent Assemblies, membership has been sustained. Membership in the World Council of Churches has been maintained from the origin of the Council and with little opposition.

The same forces, it is true, that were influential in shaping the mind of the denomination in this area in the nineteen twenties are still alive in the denomination today. Nevertheless, the majority vote of the General Assembly during the last twenty-five years has consistently been positive in ecumenical outlook, open to conversation and fellowship with all Christian churches. No one contributed more to this changed outlook than did Ernest Trice Thompson.

The seventeenth-century pattern of Reformed thought which had dominated the life of the church in the nineteen twenties began to break in the nineteen forties. Many influences had a part in this development. The increased number of seminary graduates who received graduate training in institutions outside the denomination was certainly influential. Ecumenical conferences and contacts made it increasingly difficult to do one's theology in isolation from the total Christian community. For many students, Professor Thompson's courses in the history of Christian thought and, in particular, in the thought of the nineteenth century brought the first break in the pattern.

Many of the problems that were raised by the nineteenth century have not been faced within the denomination. The task of doing theology in a world that has experienced the scientific revolution has only begun to be taken seriously. The significance of living religions for Christian faith has been examined only in a peripheral way. The responsibilities and the problems of life in an urban, industrial, pluralistic, secular society have just begun to be faced, partly because so much of the area served by the denomination is still in the Protestant era of American life. The question of the proper relationship to and attitude toward "secular" areas of life

and society has hardly been raised. Here, too, Ernest Trice Thompson's openness to new problems and his concern for a relevant church life have been distinctive contributions, as illustrated in the study book, *Tomorrow's Church, Tomorrow's World*, even though these problems have not received major attention within the denomination.

The role of Professor Thompson in assisting the denomination to face the fact of the Enlightenment was effective on many fronts. He is, above all, a teacher of the church's ministry and a presbyter who takes his responsibilities with genuine seriousness. He is a journalist and a writer, whose church school lessons have influenced more people than can be known. He lives a varied life in the church; but with a consistency practiced by few, he has been fighting his battles and facing the issues of the day. Those who know him never doubt where he will stand, nor do they doubt that he will fight to the end. Clarity of purpose and consistency of action are the sources of his influence. His election as moderator of the General Assembly in 1959 was a testimony to the depth and extent of that influence.

Professor Thompson's influence as a teacher in the church, not only in the classroom but also through the church press and the exercise of the responsibilities of committee assignments and moderatorships calls for special notice. His estimate of the church press as a teaching device is clearly indicated in the time and energy that he has given to the *Presbyterian Standard*, the *Presbyterian of the South* and the *Presbyterian Outlook*. He merits the honor of being called the chief founder of the *Presbyterian Outlook*. The influence of these journals in shaping the life of the Presbyterian Church in the United States cannot be estimated, but there is no question that it has been great indeed.

Ernest Trice Thompson's influence on the church has been especially evident in his discharge of committee assignments. He has been especially concerned with the structures of the church, not as ends in themselves but as a means of the church's preaching, teaching, and ministry in general. This is well illustrated in his work in the fields of social and moral welfare, and of the minister and his work.

As Moderator of the General Assembly of the Presbyterian Church in the United States, Ernest Trice Thompson was again the teacher of the church. His addresses were always more than "pious admonition," promotional exhortations and popular clichés. He always spoke about the great

issues of the day: the changing character of the South, the prophetic witness of the church in such problem areas as race relations, the constructive task of theology in a post-Enlightenment and revolutionary age, the ecumenical character and mission of the church.

## *The Task Ahead*

The task of Christian obedience in history never arrives at a resting place. Men do grow weary in theology and in life and make for themselves a resting place. But Christian obedience is an endless journey. The confrontation with the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century is surely not the final resting place of Christian theology and ethics. The theological achievements of Barth, Niebuhr, and others have already begun a new era, in fact, an era which in some places has already grown old. Thus Christian obedience means that the transition of the past four decades is no resting place for us.

It is a painful fact that the liberal battle was not fully won. The reception given the series of articles by four seminary professors in the *Presbyterian Outlook* in 1962 on the infallibility of the Bible is evidence enough of this. First of all, it was clear that the right and necessity of critical, historical study of the Scriptures are not acknowledged by all. Yet perhaps of greater significance was the reaction of those who did not believe that the issue should be even discussed! No doubt the acrimony of the liberal-fundamentalist controversy has tempted many Presbyterians into a kind of theological anti-intellectualism that defaults in matters of theological responsibility. But default in theological responsibility plays into the hands of a corporation ecclesiology that believes what is good for the denomination is good for the Kingdom of God.

The liberal battle was not fully won, but today it is increasingly a battle fought out of its time. The task which lies before and ahead of us now is to serve God as theologians and churchmen in the midst of the issues of this day. Today many are beneficiaries of the work of men such as Ernest Trice Thompson, who freed the life of the denomination from a bondage that would have destroyed theological scholarship and prophetic ministry. Today no one can be a significant theologian without knowing the meaning

of the Liberalism of the nineteenth century, but neither can one be a significant theologian or minister if he makes Liberalism a new orthodoxy.

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The mind of the Presbyterian Church was shaped once in the time of slavery and the Civil War by men of great stature, such as Thornwell and Palmer. When the final history of the past four decades is written, it may well be seen that Ernest Trice Thompson played a similar role in shaping the mind and outlook of the Presbyterian Church in the middle of the twentieth century. For he, more than any other, insisted that the church face the fact of the Enlightenment and the nineteenth century—the greatest of all the dividing lines in the history of the church.

John Haddon Leith
*Professor of Historical Theology*
*Union Theological Seminary in Virginia*

## *Ernest Trice Thompson as Presbyter and Churchman*

ORDAINED 1917

MINISTER Manhattan Presbyterian Church, El Paso, Texas, 1921-1922

MODERATOR Synod of Virginia 1931, 1940

MODERATOR General Assembly, 1959

UNION THEOLOGICAL SEMINARY
- Professor of English Bible, 1922-1925
- Professor of Church History, 1925-1964

*PRESBYTERIAN STANDARD*
- Associate Editor, 1924-1931

*PRESBYTERIAN OF THE SOUTH*
- Associate Editor, 1931-1937
- Editor, 1937-1943

*PRESBYTERIAN OUTLOOK*
- Leader in re-organization of *Presbyterian of the South* as *Presbyterian Outlook*
- Editor-in-Chief, 1943-1946
- Co-editor, 1946-

MINISTER AND HIS WORK
- Chairman of special committee that drew up plan for Commission on Vacancy and Supply of East Hanover Presbytery. This plan was later incorporated in *Book of Church Order,* 1936
- Chairman, Commission on Minister and His Work, East Hanover Presbytery, 1936-1945, 1947-1953
- Chairman, General Assembly Committee on Minister and His Work that drew up plans for enlargement of work of committee under a full-time director, 1950



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SOCIAL AND MORAL WELFARE

Member of General Assembly's committee in its various forms, 1934-1958

Member, Committee on Social and Moral Welfare, Synod of Virginia, 1932-1940

BOARD OF CHURCH EXTENSION

Member of Board, 1949-1958, 1963-

PERMANENT JUDICIAL COMMITTEE OF GENERAL ASSEMBLY

Member, 1937-1943

ALLIANCE OF REFORMED CHURCHES THROUGHOUT THE WORLD HOLDING THE PRESBYTERIAN SYSTEM

Member, 1945-1955

COMMITTEE ON STUDY OF ASSEMBLY'S AGENCIES

Member, 1947-1951

JUBILEE COMMITTEE (75th anniversary)

Member, 1934-1936

CENTENNIAL COMMITTEE (100th anniversary)

Member, 1958-1961

## *Selections . . .*

### FROM THE PUBLISHED WORKS OF ERNEST TRICE THOMPSON

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*For the past forty years, there has flowed from the pen of Dr. Thompson a steady stream of editorials, Sunday School lessons, committee reports, chapel talks, book reviews, and kindred works, in addition to a significant number of ample volumes. Dr. Rolston's account of Dr. Thompson as a writer and author discusses this large body of published material. There has been no attempt to include the bulk of Dr. Thompson's published works in the following bibliography. Only his more substantial books, pamphlets, and articles are cited here.*

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